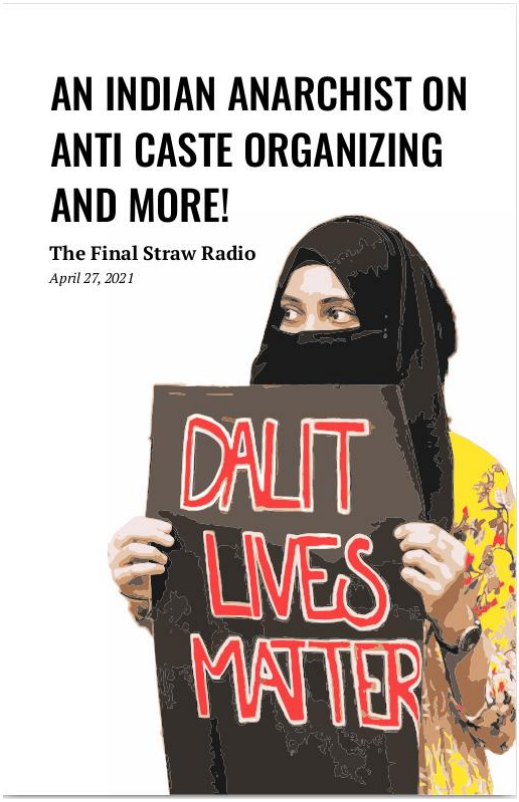
An Indian Anarchist on Anti Caste Organizing and More!

Pranav Jeevan P, The Final Straw Radio



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BOG: Would you please introduce yourself with your name preferred gender pronouns location or any other information that makes sense for the purpose of this chat?

PJP: okay. So, I am Pranav Jeevan P and I identify with the pronouns he and him. I am basically from the district of Palakkad, which is in the state of Kerala in India. So, as far as where I come from I am actually right now doing my PhD in artificial intelligence in the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, Maharashtra. I am part of the Anti-Caste Ambedkarite movement in India. And most of the issues that I struggle around the lack of representation of marginalized communities in the higher education sector in India, especially the engineering colleges and STEM fields. So, where I come from personally... my background is that I come from what is called a backward caste. And both my parents, they're first generation high schoolers, like they got their diploma. So, they were the first in their family to actually complete formal education and get jobs That actually enabled me to access a really good education and go for higher studies. And even though that was the case, the society that I am currently living in is filled with the elements of patriarchy and caste. Even though the state of Kerala is comparatively better than the services in India, as far as the Human Development Index and literacy is concerned. It is almost similar in living conditions to the Western countries like Britain or US. But the evils of caste and of the particular hierarchical structures & social structures are very obvious here. And my parents really had to face that in the workplace, and especially the places that we live, which are sorted by the dominant caste.

WG: Yeah, yeah, definitely. And I think now, like, especially in the US, the issue of caste and casteism is becoming a little bit more visible just through the work of people visualizing it, and and also the election of Kamala Harris, who is half South Asian herself, and she's from an extremely privileged caste. And some people are talking about that, and we would love to talk about that some more later in the interview. But in terms of anarchism in India, although anarchism, you know, was a philosophy that motivated people involved in the movement against British colonialism, like, like Bhagat Singh, for example. And through the independence struggle, anarchism, as a cohesive philosophy doesn't seem to have much of a life in modern India, does that seem like a fair estimation? How did you come to identify with the philosophy and how has it melded with your work and thought?

PJP: Okay, so that's the first issue with anarchism in India. Anarchism is unheard concept in India, as an ideology. It has never been studied or even in the activist circles, like people who actually study ideologies, who goes to this fight, even they are not completely aware that such a philosophy actually exists. I think, even in the freedom struggle, like there were self proclaimed anarchists who actually did anarchist organizing, like Har Dayal and MPT Acharya they were actually never active within India, because most of the organizing happened for Har Dayal that happened in the US. he started an anarchist movement in US, and even MPT Acharya, he was active in Europe. And so it's like very few individuals who actually studied and none of them actually did much organizing in the subcontinent. So, that was one thing and the case of Bhagat Singh, identified himself as a Marxist and he was an admirer of Lenin. He wanted to study Lenin's life and things like that, but he had an attraction towards anarchism, and he wrote about it. So he had published a series of articles on anarchism and that might be the only articles on anarchism that is existing in India.

And then what happened is, the Marxist dominance happened in India like the what people call us community, some people identify immediately with the Communist Party of India, the ML party and The problem is, everyone identifies communism or like the left radical thinking with this particular party. They don't know anything beyond that. So, whenever we talk about the left ideas, people immediately associate that "okay – you are talking about communism, and the CPI/ML party". So, or like the what is happening in USSR or China and things like that, there is no awareness or any rigorous academic, or even activist awareness about this particular ideology. Like when I talk to people who actually read a lot about different ideologies, they haven't heard, or they haven't read much about Kropotkin or Bakunin, or what actually happened between them, him and Marx. Yeah, people are really unaware of this particular ideology. The funny thing is that there are many people in India, actually very huge number of people in India who actually are following anarchist ideals of like, who understand anti authoritarianism. Who

understands the importance of liberty and equality. Who understands the importance of mutual aid. and who actually work on this kind of decentralized organizing and everything! But they don't know that there is a philosophy like this, that is existing already, on which activists have been propagating. They just don't know that they're anarchists yet. So, that is the whole issue with anarchism in India right now. So, part of what I am trying to do is that. So since there is this moment of this Anti-Caste movement against this hierarchical social structure, which combines attacking all kinds of hierarchies like patriarchy, class violence, caste violence, there is this language superiority, colorism... All of this type hierarchies, which exists in society, and anarchism, as an ideology is best suited for it and I am trying to build that bridge between these the more political movements and social movements that are happening in India, in this ideology. Just showing that these are not separate. There is it an ideology is already existing, which you are actually following. You just don't know it, but you're already doing it. So, that there will be a much more academic and organizational backing to the moment that are already happening.

That makes so much sense, you know, we or I at least I don't want to speak for my co-host. But I understand anarchism, like the construct of anarchism to be you know, as coming from like, these sort of very imperialistic backgrounds or powers. And I think that it's articulating something that people who have to survive in the face of a lot of different kinds of oppressions do naturally, in a way. So, like, that makes so much sense. How did you come to anarchism? Like, you said, you're writing a lot you are trying to build bridges, like how did you first like stumble across it? Or or how did it first start to make sense to you?

Okay, so initially, for me I started as an Anti-Caste. I was reading more and more and more about anti-militarist and anti-caste activism and I was part of the anti-caste struggle. Then I realized one particular thing that people are always... so, every person gets oppressed by certain hierarchies and they are getting privileged from certain other hierarchies. For example: there are upper caste women who suffer due to patriarchy, which suppresses them, but they get privileged from the caste system, that gives them privilege. And they get to oppress the lower caste men and women. There are lower caste men who are oppressed by the caste system, but they have privileged over a woman when we will look at that. So there are these multiple dimensions of hierarchies, which exist simultaneously. And I was thinking of like, what kind of ideology can actually attack power, because people when when they then there's fighting against hierarchies, they kind of forget that every hierarchy creates a power imbalance and it is the power imbalance that has to be fought.

Of course, the fights are different. You cannot attack background either way you attack castes or the way you attack religious fundamentalism but the way power works is never studied deeply and I wanted to understand more about what is the fundamental nature of power that is creating these hierarchies and ensuring these hierarchies. So, in many of the movements you see these leaders emerging, and taking control of the movement. And suddenly after some time, the position of leadership becomes a lucrative post, which attracts people who, who don't have the will to fight for the cause, but who just want to capture the power or to show themselves as the savior of all the oppressed people... to be the voice. They just want attention and privilege that the power gives and the voice that it gives them. So, that nature of how power is getting concentrated on few people: that I observe across these different hierarchies, like in every hierarchy there is this position of power and it always comes to certain few indigenous communities. And then I started looking for other ways of organizing or other alternatives which actually tries to create a system in which the power itself is decentralized. So, I was introduced to socialism and it gave the opportunity to create a society that is built on justice and liberty and equality. But how to organize a society, and because the nature of power is such that whenever there is a small accumulation of power, it will attract all the people to concentrate power.

I was trying to find systems which are designed so that there will be complete democracy, there will be decentralization of power where people can actually exercise all that, because without dilution of power, if there is a concentration of power, it'll automatically create hierarchies, if this hierarchy is broken, and the hierarchy will replace it. So I wanted to attack the fundamental thing. I identify the

fundamental nature of power and how to fight it. That is how I came to read about like, the critique of Bakunin and Kropotkin on the communist moment, so how they told that like, the idea of a Vanguard party or the dictatorship of proletariat, how it wouldn't happen because of this accumulation of power. That no matter how much you try it will not match up with that, because it's the property of power, no matter how well-intentioned it is, an accumulation of power will always result in hierarchies. Once hierarchy is established, it always try to protect itself. So, once I started reading Kropotkin and then then I understood that Okay, so, these are the people who actually understand how power works, and they are trying to develop or design systems that will keep power in check or make sure that the concentration of power doesn't happen. Then I realized "Okay, so, this is what I have been looking for so long! This is something that is really needed right now. In all the moments that are for social justice happening in India right now." Because what has been observed until now is that whenever there is a social struggle, it kind of fizzles out or it kind of breaks down because of this particular concentration of power. It is not helping it. All the approaches or from top down. So there will be few leaders who will be commanding. So once the leader falls the entire struggle fades. So and there has never been much work towards building the movement from the grassroot level, that will be much more sustained. And anarchism actually gets a better analysis of how to do that.

BOG: So in some of your writing, you bring up parallels between different movements that have existed in the last decade or so in various countries. For instance, the Anti-CAA movement and some occupations related to it. As well as the distributed mutual aid that's existed in... for instance: the farmers movement. Are there other examples of anarchistic approaches that are already existing in Indian culture and in political movement that you think are worthwhile of pointing out that that maybe could be used to help bridge an understanding of how this philosophy is already in action and how to run with it from there?

PJP: So, the issue with anarchism in India is that Indian society is designed to be hierarchical. It is designed for not just one hierarchy, it is designed for multiple hierarchies everywhere. Indians are indoctrinated to respect authority, just like like complete subservience without questioning. That is considered as a sign of obedience. Obedience is glorified here. You don't disrespect the people who are older to you no matter what they say. The woman can never disrespect the man even if he's wrong. So that glorification of subservience is core to the Indian social order. Anyone who tries to break that social order will be severely punished. So you might have heard of honor killings in India. If a boy and a girl from different castes get married, they'll be killed by their family themselves because they broke the social order. And that is happening even in India right now. It's very rampant. So its a society where hierarchy is celebrated. And it is considered the norm. On organizing leaderless? that happened with the Anti-CAA protests and the farmers protest. It was unprecedented.

I think one of the reasons why the scale of these protests... if you see, these have been the most massive protests India has seen after independence. So once the Anti-CAA, the Citizenship Amendment Act, which was passed 19 of December. The moment it was passed there was no call by a political party or citizen activist group to create this huge protest. It was just people just came themselves out to the streets and started sloganeering and they started meetings, and they started to occupy places. So it was a spontaneous thing. And I don't think it was just because of this current one law. It was because of the decades of neo-liberalism, assault on rights of certain democratic institutions that has been happening, and the rising inequality that India has been witnessing for the last 20 years. When such a draconian law was passed people said "that enough is enough." They just wanted to raise their voice because they felt one after the other that their right as citizens was being taken away from them. Whenever there is organizing like of this sort that was happening before, there is always a tendency of infantilizing. Saying "Okay, these people don't know what they are doing. They are not educated or they are not aware of what they are protesting against." So there is this tendency by the media and the government to delegitimize protesters claiming that they are unaware of what they're talking about, like "we are the ones the experts, we know everything." These people are illiterate, they are they don't know exactly what is what is good for them, basically. And this particular law, once it was passed, like people came

out, telling exactly what was wrong with them. They were articulating and ,regarding the Shaheen Bagh Protests, In India, there are these communities who we naturally stereotype as uneducated or who have no agency. And the Shaheen Bagh Protests was a symbol of a category of people who were considered to have no agency, no education, no rights. They came out and they occupied a particular spot and demanded their rights. It was an unprecedented moment in Indian history. There were Muslim women, who were likely not to be not to have education more than like a high school education, who were housewives. There are like, women of all ages from children to more than 90 years old. And they came. They knew that there was an injustice that is being imposed on them. And they came out to fight for their rights. So it broke multiple preconceived notions of what a citizen is, and how aware they are of their rights. And I think that is the first symbol of democracy. Where the citizens starts to assert their right.

I think subsequently, the citizenship protest started in December, it went till March and then the COVID pandemic broke out. Due to which the protest had to be called off. But the model that was shown in the citizenship protests in which literally every major city, there was massive demonstrations of millions of Indians coming to the streets and fighting for their rights. Okay, now, here's the second thing. India is heavily divided on sectarian lines of caste, of color, of language, of religion, of cuisine, of culture, of religion. So, what the government expected was, and since this particular government is far right hyper Nationalist government. So every fascist government has this tendency to create an other, so that they can demonize that community in hopes of getting electoral or political gains from the rest of the group. So in India, what the BJP government is doing is they are demonizing the Muslim community which comes to about 14 to 15% of the population. And so that they can get electoral gains from the rest. And they bring up all these issues, the Hindu Muslim binary issues, because everywhere the government is failing, the government is completely failing the corporations, they are taking away the worker and labor rights. The labor laws have been diluted. The economy is falling. Inequality is rising. The public health care and public education system is completely being dismantled. There are no jobs, there's a higher level of unemployment. To mask all these failures of the government, the government will keep on bringing up this Hindu Muslim binary.

All these laws, the Kashmir issue, the anti-CAA. The CA law itself was a way to distract people from what is actually happening, like what is the actual issues the country is facing. But here the government is calculated. People came, actually more than Muslims, it was the other people from the other religions like Hindu, from other communities like Dalits, OBC's (Other Backwards Castes), everyone came together, because they understood what exactly the media and the government is trying to do, and the narrative that they're trying to build. They just broke through the narrative. They just came out in support in solidarity with each other. And that was a turning point, I think in the Indian democracy, I think this is one of the first signs that that there is some democracy that is actually left in India. Not the institutions, or the government, or the machinery, but actually in people themselves. There is a democratic feeling. There is a sense of democracy and that is being expressed right now. Actually, we were really disappointed when such a public outrage was not happening when the Kashmir issue came out. When the government implemented Article 35, which actually granted special privileges to the state of Kashmir. They completely threw away the elected democratic government of the state and imposed their complete control without consulting a democratically elected government. So by that time it was disappointing to see that the government, the people of the country, were not actually coming forward to protest it. But after this happened, within two months, when the CA bill was passed, the Citizenship Amendment Act was passed, then the nation reacted. So that actually gave hope. And since occupation protest has never been more successful. India has always seen rallies in which people just walk to the National Capital of the state capitol and stay there for some days and then they just come back. If prolonged occupation protest actually needs the idea of mutual aid and solidarity, because you need these protests are participated by millions of people. Like the farmer protests that is right now happening in Delhi has more than 300,000 farmers that are stationed on all the borders. And it is not easy to sustain such huge protests, without the kind of mutual aid and solidarity networks that is right

now existing. And in that mutual aid network of this scale, I think is unprecedented in human history for protests.

BOG: It's amazing to see that many people in one place for a common reason, and also being able to sustain such high numbers of people is really prefigurative. So I was wondering if we could get back to the issue... because a lot of us in the west in the US in particular, myself, who doesn't come from any sort of Indian background has a very, very weak understanding of the caste system and I know that you've done a lot of writing and activism around the evolution of it. Can you talk a bit about some of its history and ground it for the listening audience. Talk about some of the modern struggles against it, including B. R. Ambedkar, who you've mentioned in some of your writings, and how you came to organize and write against it, how does an opposition to caste-ism intersect with your work against patriarchy and and how can anarchists specifically add to your anti-caste analysis?

PJP: Okay, so the caste system is something that started I think, around like 5000 years back. So it is this is the oldest form of strict social hierarchy. It existed in India since I think when the Aryans came to settle in India, and this has been mentioned in the the Rig Veda and everywhere. So what this basically does is creates a gradient inequality. It is not a strict inequality that you see in places with slavery,serfdom, and things like that. This is gradient inequality. So, a gradient inequality, it's like a ladder, in which there are multiple castes, with one on top of the other. So, the person who is on the very top, they get all the privileges. The person who is the right below them, they are also fine, as long as they get to oppress those who are below them. So, they will forget, and or they will actually increase their own oppression, because there are people below them who they can oppress. So for every class that you look at, there is always someone below them. This this particular gradient inequality survived for all this time, because there is very little incentive for people to actually fight against it, because there are people below them that they can actually completely exploit. So how is caste system practiced? So one way of it is practiced is by enforced endogamy. So a woman doesn't have any rights. As far as the Indian social organization. The woman, their main purpose is for child rearing and being the homemaker. They have to worship their husband, and that is the ideal wife, or the ideal mother. And here is where the patriarchy comes in within this structure, they can't remarry. They have to keep women in control because everything about our system is about purity.

The way it works, the people at the top top... they don't eat or drink with, or even touch the people who are below them. There's this practice of untouchability. Actually, in my part, the Kerala State where I am from we had a practice of unapproach-ability. The higher caste people won't allow people of the lower caste to come less than 10 feet to them. So forget touching, even coming close enough to pollute them. In certain castes who are considered at the very bottom of the caste hierarchy, they won't even allow them to come out in the sun. So that the upper class people won't have to see them, because the mere sight of these people will make them polluted. So there were communities in this country who weren't allowed to walk in during day, they could only get out of their home at night. That was the way this thing has been working for centuries. People of one caste cannot marry another caste. So that is precisely why they had to practice this strict patriarchy. Women cannot be allowed to have independent wishes. Their their bloodline has to be pure. Even the food that we eat.

Basically the people of the higher caste pride themselves of being vegans, that they don't eat meat. They consider meat as something which is polluting. It's only the people who are from the deepest caste which eat meat. Basically, because all the economic and cultural capital always start with the upper caste and the people from the lower caste had to basically live with whatever was available to them. So that social realities that are existing in society was enshrined into the way these people live and interact and behave. This remained exactly the same till the Britishers. So, India has been ruled by multiple communities like between 80,000 to 83 Britishers. India was also ruled by Muslims. But even when India is ruled by people from other religions, the evil of caste system never dies. So a person who is born in the lower caste, even if they convert to another religion, they won't lose their caste.

So, basically, if Islam and Christianity... these are religions which actually doesn't have the caste system right? But in India, when you come and look, you can find that there is a caste system within

these religions. The people who actually convert to Islam who are from the higher caste, they have a richer status, they have their own separate mosques in which they will never allow people from the lower caste who converted to Islam to attend. Similarly with Christianity, for example, in Kerala, the people that top-most caste is called the Brahmins. That is why we call it a Brahminical hierarchy, or Brahminical patriarchy, the caste system. So the Brahmins who converted to Christianity, they are the dominant Christians who have all the wealth and all the land and all the power, political and social. The people who actually converted to Christianity who are from like.. let's say, fishermen trade or from various other lower castes, they will never get the respect. These people actually practice untouchability on them, even though they're not actually belong to the Hindu religion anymore. Now here comes the other issue, if you're born in a lower caste, no matter if you can actually make money, if you actually gain wealth through any means, still, you won't be allowed to enter many places, because of your caste. So this is something that might promote economic mobility, but you will never have social mobility. The lower caste were not allowed to enter temples a place of worship of Hindu religion, for like years, it's just only in the 20 century that they were allowed to enter. So, even Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, he had to have a huge mobilization to get the higher caste to open templates for the lower caste. And there are places in villages where the people of lower caste cannot access water. There are ways from the public bath from which the lower caste people can not access even today in India. So, there are public baths, where people from the lower caste can't access. In some places when you go you are served different utensils in restaurants, separately for upper caste and lower caste even today.

And now, the problem with this is that once the British came and there was this influx of Western education in India, the people who were at the top of the hierarchy, especially the Brahmins, were the first to get a chance to access education and all the knowledge that was provided to it. So, these people from this particular caste who actually form less than 4% of the Indian population, they dominate literally all the fields. When you go to any elite University in India, they are all belong to this particular caste, all the students belong to this particular caste. You go to media, all the news channels are run and operated by them, all the businesses in India run by these families, you go to the media, like the movie industry, all the actors that you see are from the upper caste.

And even the Indians who actually move abroad – the Indians who actually migrate to USA, so the way you talk about Kamala Harris, the fact that these people were able to move to the next country, because they had the economic and social capital to actually have the money to go elsewhere and start working there. That is why most of the Indians who are actually immigrants, who actually live in the other countries are upper caste Indians, they don't represent the entire the actual Indian population. So, all the people who actually immigrate from India to the other countries are upper caste, they take their caste with them. So then people from the lower caste when they are actually moving abroad, because they have access to it, they are discriminated by these people who are in dominant places. So most of the people who are in the in the western universities, Indians who claim that they have been racially discriminated actually practice caste discrimination in their own households and to their fellows. So, what I personally work on is the issue of Indian Government, once the constitution was framed and since Dr. BR Ambedkar, he was the architect of the Constitution. So, there was certain safeguards that was introduced in the Indian constitution for the people of backward castes, so that they get adequate representation in all spheres of life. In economic, social, and political.

So here comes the reservation system in India, which is like heavily debated topic. So it is a little bit different from the way affirmative action works in the US. Here, a fixed number of seats or a percentage of seats, it's correlates to a proportion of the population which is actually kept aside for people from this backward community, so that they will have representation in all the spheres, but this is actually only implemented in the government sector, which is less than 10% of all the jobs in India and all educational institutions in India. So even in this small available seats among the Indian opportunities that are accessible to Indians, what we find is that since all the topmost positions are being dominated by the dominant caste. They deny this constitutionally granted safeguards to these people from the marginalized communities. The norms are never implemented. So even after 70 years of independence,

even the higher education institutions, especially the IIT's" (Indian Institute of Technology, a network of tech universities in India) is one of the elite institutions in the world, more than 95% of all the faculty are from upper caste, even though the law states that 50% of the seats has to be from people from the backward class. Like it is completely thrown out even after 70 years. And when you take the students, again, more than 70, since the professor's can choose the students directly, especially with regard to the PG admissions, the postgraduate admissions. They deny access to the students who actually come from the backward castes, and they only allow students from their own community to get these opportunities. And this network of nepotism in a way actually creates a huge barrier for the people who actually comprises more than 75% of the Indian population from accessing any of these facilities: education, health care... you name it, the representation is almost zero.

WG: Thank you for going through that in such detail. I think that interfacing with this system, which is over 5000 years old, is a continuous, imposed social hierarchy that is extremely adaptive, like it has adapted through countless social movements, and it's still remains somewhat intact is a little bit difficult for folks to wrap their heads around having something so old to struggle against, and that really, really shapes people's lives and people's destinies for them. And you talked a little bit about this, about how the caste system gets exported to regions where immigrants go or like a Desi community forms. But I was wondering if you could expand a little bit on this? Or say some more words about this meaning specifically, why should In your opinion, internationals, be aware of the caste system? And its worldwide implications?

PJP: Yeah. So regarding why should the international community be aware of this particular system is that most of the international community are aware of racism, colonialism, and I think like the fascism... they have experienced with all these different hierarchies. They have a history of struggle against it, they can easily identify it, they can fight it. They have succeeded against it, like many struggles have been succeeded. But caste is a kind of hierarchy, which even after so much time, there hasn't been a clear path to victory, because of its great inequality component, which is not actually present in most other hierarchies. Like in other hierarchies, you can easily distinguish between the people who are oppressed, of course, there can be other dimensions, which actually split people and won't allow them to unite. For example in India, even in within castes, who actually share the same social rank, there, there won't be unity between them, because there might be internal disputes of like, who has more land, who has access to water for farming and things like that. I think a similar case occurs between maybe like the blacks and Latinos in the US. So they have the same social standing, because they are both oppressed by the structure or the community above them. But there is this lack of cohesion between them. But this lack of cohesion is not because these people get to oppress someone else. It is because there is a narrative that is being created of a lack of cohesion between the two. That's it, it is the dominant narrative by the government or the dominant communities of the people who actually have a command over the knowledge production, like the academicians, who mostly come from the dominant caste. The news anchors will be from the dominant caste. The people who will create literature will be from the dominant caste. The people who make movies, the actors, everyone comes from a dominant caste. The narrative and the knowledge that is produced is from the dominant caste and there is no knowledge that is being produced to meet the demand of this particular community.

So, that is actually what causes the rift between them, and they are constantly being fed by false narrative and fake news telling that the other person is the the reason you aren't getting opportunities. So, they fight internally, but caste is a little bit different. In caste, even though there are internal conflicts, they are fine with caste system, because they always have someone below them they can exploit. So, they can actually take pride in the fact that "okay, I am superior to someone else, I'm happy with that" They are okay with someone on top exploiting them, because of that particular nature of this system. And that is one of the reasons why the people of each different caste in the different levels of the social hierarchy have complete mistrust towards each other. So, the Brahmins they're on top. they're completely fine. because no one oppresses them. The problem is that when you go down even when you go down to the cast, who are literally at the bottom they are also fine with the system because they

get to oppress someone below them. So, a complete unity a vertical spectrum is not happening. And of course, there has been moments in India, like there have been moments of anti-caste in Kerala has happened in Maharashtra led by Jyotiba Phule, in Tamil Nadu led by Periyar there has been moments it was happening, but the problem always was that the condition that was established breaks away, because when you give what can I say, when you give power or political representation or economic representation, in a token form, there is a fight among all these communities to get that because we have a reservation! So out of 100 seats, let us say 50 seats are reserved for the community for the backward castes, but there are like 1000s of backward castes. So who gets to be in this 50 becomes another issue altogether. So the one who actually have access to some social capital might actually gain that advantage and certain communities in this particular caste, they will feel that "okay, it is because of them that I didn't get to get this particular representation" and they would have resentment for their fellow caste men rather than the people who created the hierarchy in the first place, who who are the Brahmins.

So, that internal rift is actually exploited by the current government. So, what happened was in the past 22 decades there has been an increase in representation in the political sphere by the backward caste. If you are from a caste in the backward communities and got that representation, it created and animosity in the minds of the other backward castes and the BJP like in the the there is ideology, they they were able to exploit that sentiment. So, that is why even though BJP, or their ideologues. The RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) is completely like a caste-ist, patriarchal, hierarchical, structure. They want to create that hierarchy completely and throw away this notion of secularism or democracy. They have support of the people from the backward communities because of this rift within the community. And there they are very good at creating narratives that tells that. So what they do is they create alternative histories. They create the idea that India had a glorious past, like before and like caste never existed in India, it was something that was brought to India by invaders. Kind of like the marriage of Nazism and Hitler – What Hitler did to alienate the Jews from the Germans. That is exactly what they are using to create their foothold in the Indian society. So they are telling that India had a glorious past, like they create these ridiculous stories of in ancient Indian technology, where India had this interplanetary travel system, we had information of genetics. So you wouldn't believe it! India has this annual Indian science conference where all the latest research findings of the Indian scientific communities discussed. In that forum one of the guys actually brought a presentation, which told that India had nuclear missile warheads, like in like 3000 BC, and we had interplanetary travel, we had stem cell research. We had teleportation. This was actually told in the Indian Science Conference. And not for just one year, it happened multiple times. So, there is currently research happening in India telling that the, let us say... that cow has magical properties. There here is golden cow urine that like if you drink cow urine cancer will be cured, AIDS will be cured. This is actually being done by the government. It is government funded program and in universities, public universities. So, there is a complete attack on logic. It's a attack on the entire scientific method. So they have, they are rewriting history textbooks to tell that we had this glorious past and it was the invaders who came, the Muslim invaders who came, the Britishers who came, who actually ruined and created differences in the Hindu society by installing caste.

WG: That's so incredible.

PJP: Yeah. So now people who actually suffer from caste system think that the enemies (the Muslims) are the enemies of Westerners who came to India, who actually... so that is why their life is crap. And they hope that this government, who actually promises them that ancient Golden Age, will actually bring prosperity back to people. When in actuality what they are doing is they are giving complete, they're giving the entire country in the hands of the corporations who completely exploit the people. They are destroying all the social security systems that have been existing in India. Like India had minimum support price for the farmers, this was taken away by this farm laws, which is where the farmers are protesting. Like Indians had the option of going to court in case a corporate actually breaks a contract of trust. Like if the contract says that "I will purchase this many quantities of potatoes from

this farmer at this rate after the harvest" and the often during the harvest time the corporate denies, like they don't agree to pay that pre agreed price. Now the farmer cannot go to the court. The right to constitutional or legal remedy have been take has been taken away by the this new laws. So the farmers are protesting, not just for the farmer laws at this point. They're actually protesting for every citizen of India for their democratic right, to, like constitutional remedies.

WG: When you're talking about sort of this government propaganda this really outlandish sort of, you know, ridiculous claims. I mean, it is true, or I believe it to be true that I mean, the India has like a vast history. And, you know, they're one of the first instances of indoor plumbing that they found archaeologically was in a city in India. I don't exactly remember where because it's a gigantic country as well. Yeah.

BOG: But they weren't teleporting the feces to another area.

WG: They weren't. It really reminds me of like the conspiracy theory machine that exists here too, on the far right, where, you know, we're being ruled by reptilian overlords and the 5g chip is going to be implanted in us in the COVID vaccine and stuff. It really reminds me of that a lot. And it's like, incredible to me that these systems seem to me to be a bit parallel in our two locations.

PJP: Yeah, it is. So right now, what the government is portraying is that what India needs is a strong leadership, which they have epitomized in the image of the Prime Minister himself, the Prime Minister Narendra Modhi. He's like the Iron Man who can like unite India and bring all the glory back to India. So they have created all these stories surrounding this particular narrative, such that in Indian society like I said, you cannot question anything that hierarchy dictates to you like, if someone is dictating something to you, you have to obey it. There is no space for what you say... democratic discussion or debate, anything that is democratic is immediately. So the first fundamental thing of democracy or democratic policy making is that when you make a law, you have to consult with the people who actually will be impacted by the law. That is the first principle of any policy-making.

And here for such a huge farm.... so let me give you an estimate like of the scale of the issue. India is a country which has more than 1.4 billion people, of which almost 60 to 70% engage directly or indirectly with agriculture. So that is like almost around 600 million people. Just doing agriculture, of which around 520 million people are living in poverty. So, a recent statistics have showed that 63% of the rural agricultural workers in India, they don't have enough income to actually get a nutritious food three times a day, they don't have it. 63%. Almost 100 million people. This is the case, if they spent their entire income in food, even if they spend their entire income in food, they still won't have enough food, nutritious food to feed them three times a day. And normally, most people don't spend their entire income in full, they have other needs, too, right. So the actual data is saying that almost 73% of the Indian Indian population on the rural population in India. If they use two thirds of their income in purchasing food, they won't still have nutritious food three times a day. So this is the status of India. And in a country like this, then the government and that to this many people are actually employed in agriculture, but the government is passing a law without consulting anyone. like and back to a time when the pandemic has hit and has completely obliterated, like, the scope of... it has completely pushed the country to its knees. It is like what the government expected was....

So the government always expected an opposition when this particular law will be passed. So the government has been sitting on this law for a long time. When the government was in power for the last six years, they never passed it till now, thinking that the farmers will protests. They immediately pass the law in the backdrop of this pandemic. Thinking back... because of the pandemic the farmers wouldn't be able to organize. And they completely misread because the farmers were like "okay, we have had enough! if the pandemic won't kill us, this law would." So in India, like more than 30 farmers are committing suicide every day, because of the agrarian distress. It's a huge issue in India. And right now, since the government is like attacking all the institutions, this was there for the Indian citizens.

So in India, the government... there is this huge array of government schools, which are like public funded schools, which literally everyone, anyone can attend without paying fees. The quality is less, because it has been systematically degraded by the governments to aid the private institutes. The same

thing is with the healthcare, but still, these Institute's where institutions are there, so that the people from the lower castes or the Muslim communities can actually send their kids to get education. And even though the quality was poor, it was a way for these communities to actually have some social mobility. But now the government is destroying even the remnants of the system that are existing the public education and the health care and they are completely opening up the country for... I don't know what the word I should use for it... I think a complete takeover by the corporate industries. The corporations can come in, they can dictate the laws of labor, the corporations can actually decide like how much time the worker should work in the factory. They can change, it was eight hours maximum, now they can increase after 12 hours arbitrarily. They don't have to pay the minimum wage anymore. So, this is like complete violation of the basic human rights and the government is completely fine with that. So, when people are protesting the government needs this diversionary tactics of like this Hindutva, like this, "we had this glorious past. You are suffering right now, because of the Muslims or the other castes, or other communities that came to India. We are the ones who will be giving you..."

The government is just a corporate propaganda machine instead of a government right now like you can see in every single place that you turn like the media or in the billboards, for every institution that you go and see you can see like pictures of the Prime Minister standing and telling that everything is going fine. We have like... India is like now becoming a symbol of hope for the world and the reality is completely opposite. So, this is not just in India, what is happening right now, right? The rise of populism and Trump in US of Boris Johnson in UK of Bolsonaro in Brazil, like this is happening everywhere at the same time because of this... I don't know... the because of this neoliberal assault on all the public institutions and I think one of the hope that I see is that simultaneously everywhere in the world. So there was this occupy protests in Mexico, in which the feminists in Mexico they went and occupied I think the National Human Rights Commission office, and they just stayed there as a protest against femicides. So I thought like, "okay, that that is similar to Shaheen Bagh, what the women in Shaheen Bagh did they just came and they occupied a particular space and they just stand there telling that they demand that they demand justice! And that is what the farmers are doing right now. They are just coming and collecting together. And right now, okay, the nature of the protests has actually changed right now, even though there are like many farmers protesting around around Delhi, the farmers are now traveling to each and every village in India right now. And they are communicating the issues of the protests, and what are the issues that are plaguing the country right now. And all these meetings are attended by 1000s and 1000s of people! This is happening right now in India, you will never find this in any of the news. But right now, that's Yeah... this is unprecedented.

Two days back, there was a meeting in one of the villages in which more than 20,000 people attended. And so the people who attended, they go back to their villages. They create a council and start creating the awareness expand the awareness of what is actually happening and why this is happening. Because you cannot trust the media in India anymore. like India has one of the worst propaganda machines in history. And they just regurgitate what the government actually tells them to do. They delegitimize the protests and they distracts people with really futile stuff. So the farmers thought that "okay, we don't need a media coverage to a pass what we have to tell the people we will directly go to the people!" Grassroot level, like bottom up, like bottom up communication. I think that's, that's amazing to see.

The attack against the agrarian sector has been there for like the past three, four decades. And systematically, the people who had land to farm they lost the land because of they're in crisis. And they had to become farm laborers, and go and work in other places where they can get money. Because of this, a lot of people who actually were farmers became a farm laborers, and they go to the Vela farms, like in Punjab and Haryana to work from other states. So that is why most of the other states in India, they never had this thing called minimum support price or this multi system, which was there in Punjab. So the reason why the protests act in Punjab was because these farmers had a lot more to lose than the other farmers. And since the way this law has been devised. So there are clauses in the law, which actually is very interesting how the legal terms are right now. How the laws are being formed by the government right now. So let me just read you one sentence from that law. "No suit prosecution,

or other legal proceedings shall lie against the central government or state government, or any officer of the central government or the state government." Or here's the interesting part, any other person in respect of anything, which is in good faith that or intended to be done under this act. Or have any rules or orders made thereafter."

So basically this is like, arbitrary. Like, you can't, you can complain against not just the government, you can complaint against any person. And not just, if they do something bad. It is intended to be done in good faith. So they can just say that this happened like this, it ended badly, but I did in good faith. So I should not be criminalized for it. This is like, ridiculous. And this is the nature of all the laws that the government has been recently passed it.

WG: It's so dangerous when there's a piece of legislation that could literally mean anything. You know, we can see this everywhere, you know, it's very bad sign, when you know, there's something that can be just arbitrary, like you said, arbitrarily applied, no matter what. I did have one last question about anti-caste organizing. I became aware of this movement, which is Dalit Lives Matter. After sort of this, we had this summer of 2020, this summer of rebellion against the murder of George Floyd. I wonder if you have any thoughts on Dalit Lives Matter or DLM? would you would you mind expanding on that?

PJP: Okay, so unlike some Black Lives Matter was actually moment in us, right like there was an organization called Black Lives Matter. And like there was huge organizing based on that particular that particular tag. But in India, of course, the the issue of Dalits has been like, and the anti-caste organizing has been happening for a long time. And since there has been a lot of similarities between the issues of black people that they've recently faced in the US and what Dalits face from caste system, there has always been a bridge, and a takeaway of learning from that moment. So when the Black Panther Party was formed in the US, for the emancipation of the black movement and the black people so that there was an awareness that was being created in the community to organize and like emancipate themselves against the oppression that they are facing, the police brutality and everything. Simultaneously, there was a Dalit Panther Party that was founded in India, all in the same ideals.

If you actually look a little deeper into the history, like you can see that the various things that the rap music or the hip hop, which was used by the black activists as a way of expressing their anger, and their protest was similarly being... is being actually similarly right now used by activists, the caste activist in India, they are using hip hop to communicate and express their ideas and anger. So there is a learning that is being happening across these two different, but in a way, similar kind of oppression that is being faced by this people. So then, then there was this issue that happened, the murder of George Floyd. And there was this huge uproar, and then in the international community, and it didn't limit to the US it it spread all around the world. Like, wherever there has been racism and colonialism, the statues were being thrown into oceans and dismantled everywhere in the world. Exactly. So it was an attack on a system of oppression. That was happening.

So in US it was black lives, right? But in other countries, there was something... like in Australia, it was indigenous tribes, right? Aboriginals Lives Matter. So, in every country, it will become a call for the people who are being oppressed. And in India, that happened, like it was the village. So when there was this Delhi Pogrom, in which there was an attack on the Muslim neighborhood, as a reaction to the anti-CAA protests, there was a new movement that came called the Muslim Lives Matter. So when a movement shows that there is something that can be used to create a mass mobilization that gets accepted or reproduced in other moments. And I think this was just a reaction to what was happening there. So since it was attacking, a voice raised against the hierarchical oppression, the similar thing just happened in India. And also another thing, why this happened to us because you can see a lot of Indian Americans there, who will be championing for Black Lives Matter, and they tell that they are also facing racism, because they are from a different community.

What we the people who are from the lower class in India find amusing is that it is these people who actually come to India and practice the same kind of oppression on the people who are below them in the cast. So this was actually a lot of this Dalit Lives Matter came as an opposition to these people,

championing the cause of black lives matter because we were like, okay, you don't get to talk about black lives matter, because you are the same, you are causing the same oppression. A lot of celebrities in in India who were like, suddenly championing for... they were raising their voice on "Okay, like, there is racism in us like I have faced racism in us." And we were like, "okay, fine, you have faced racism or you got dismissed because you are Indian, but just remember the caste system that you are imposing on the fellow Indians? And why are you not raising the voices?" So all the people who from the dominant caste raise the voice against the BLM, but in India every day, like, only the women are being raped. Yeah. And they're brutalized, and like they're beaten, they're paraded naked for being Dalit. It is a show of power by Dalit communities, to put their lives in their proper place. And none of these people who are actually championing BLM, they never raised their voice against us. So we were like, "Okay, so we are creating your another, like, let's say hashtag. Just like black lives matter. That is what you missed, at least then then promote this too." It was it was a mixture of all these emotions, basically that came to the emergence of Dalit Lives Matter.

WG: Thank you for going into that too. Like, it's something that I've been seeing and yeah, it was, it was good to hear your thoughts on the matter and it makes a lot of sense that you know, yeah, people who were in the US and her from extremely privileged castes were like it completely ignoring the oppressions that they perpetrate. So thank thank you for going into that.

PJP: So actually, with regard to the Kamla Harris issue, recently, there was this case in California, in I think, John Doe versus the state of California, in which the internet employee in the Cisco company faced caste discrimination from his superiors. So they both actually went to the same Institute, like the one that I'm actually studying right now, IIT Bombay. So they are alumni of that Institute. And so this guy knew that John Doe was actually a Dalit. And he outed that to his other Indian colleagues and that led to him being discriminated in matters of job assignments, his appraisal, and stuff like that. He's didn't get promotions and he complained. And then it became obvious that the state of California doesn't have a legal prohibition against caste discrimination. So there is currently a case that is being going on in California Court, which actually wants to include caste discrimination in the list of all the oppressions that people face along with racism and colorism and other things.

WG: Yeah, I remember hearing about that.

PJP: Yeah. And since Kamala Harris is from an Indian origin, and she actually... her grandfather is a Brahmin, her mother is Brahmin. So she's, yeah, she's from the dominant community. And they're also called by the activists in US that Kamala Harris would actually make a statement in this matte. Because she claims to suffer racism and everything. And like, why are you not telling anything about this particular issue? That is actually much more closer to you than any other American actually.

WG: Kamala Harris is a huge, you know, you know, sticky wicket, I think because like she was the, you know, the District Attorney of Oakland, California. Her job basically was to incarcerate black people, you know, like the incarceration rates in Oakland are exactly the result of stuff that she has perpetrated. So she's a police officer, she incarcerates a huge amount of black people. I'm sure she suffers, you know, suffers racism, you know, I'm sure that she does. But like, she also perpetrates a whole hell of a lot of racism, not even to mention the fact that she's a Brahmin, you know.

PJP: So that is one thing that I actually keep saying again, and again. People very easily identify the hierarchies that oppresses them, but they are not ready to acknowledge the hierarchies that gives them privilege. Absolutely. And I think anarchism is an ideology, this is where I was attracted to it the most because it doesn't attack one hierarchy. It attacks every hierarchy, the legitimacy of all hierarchies. And I think even when I'm when in the struggle against caste, a caste as a hierarchy is not a single hierarchy. It has patriarchy. It has classism. It has language. It has cuisine. Like there are multiple aspects of it. And you don't just attack caste as a single entity, you need to attack caste from all these angles and that philosophy actually gives you the tools to at least create a narrative of how to attack these oppressive hierarchies. In a way that people can understand... Okay, even if I am not oppressed by your hierarchy, and if there's a hierarchy that I am being oppressed by, I should be able to relate or translate my oppression to the other hierarchies too.

So that I can in a way empathize with what is happening to other. I think that can create a huge change if more people are actually aware of it. And without any teaching of anarchist ideas it is automatically happening like this spontaneously happening in the farmers protest. Because in farmer protest, many of the landed farmers are from a... I wouldn't say dominant caste... They are like basically still a backward caste, but a better off backward castes, called Jats. And most of the agricultural laborers are from the Dalit communities. So historically, there has been a rift between these two. But since these new farm law came there has been a new emergence of solidarity, in which the landed caste now understand the struggles that the laborers are facing. And the laborer castes, they acknowledge that if these laws are implemented, now, it won't just affect the landed caste, it will penetrate and it will affect the people who are actually employed as laborers too. And now there has been voice voices being raised on redistribution of land to the Dalit laborers, a raise of minimum wage, and other other things. So and, and here is the most beautiful part, the participation of women in the protests in India has been like... it has increased significantly, because recently almost 20% of the people who are currently stationed around Delhi the protesters are women. Which is huge when you consider the fact that India still is a hugely patriarchal society in which which doesn't allow a woman to step out of the room, you can see a woman driving tractors. And the funny thing is almost 80% of all agricultural laborers are women. But most of them they are unpaid, like they are, they are expected to work. This particular protest actually shows the agency of women and their awareness. And it bring forth the strength and unity that the woman can actually show and the solidarity that they can contribute in this protest. And the issues that women face: like the patriarchy, the lack of wages, lack of equal wages, then there is this maternity benefits, this is a huge other array of issues, which are now being recognized because of this particular protest. Earlier, it would only be just limited to this one struggled against like a particular law or a particular event. Right now, everything is being discussed. And I think that's a huge part. Or it gives me hope, that like, okay, now, at least the people are slowly awakening and they realize that they have more to lose together.

WG: I'm also very happy that the participation of women in the farmers protest has been so foregrounded by people who have been writing about it, or at least the people that who have been writing about it that I've read, like I've read your work on it. I've read some other folks' work on talking about the farmers protests and it's really cool that people are foregrounding the participation of women. And like, contextualizing it as a very important, you know, aspect to the protests,

PJP: So I have explained a lot of how the mutual aid was happening, right? Like, of all the networks of solidarity that was shown how community kitchens were being organized, and how from the village and the food, grains and milk and all the essentials were being brought, how volunteers are collecting blankets for these farmers. During winter there was medical aid that was being set up. There were laundry rooms set up to wash their clothes. And so the other thing that there has to be understood is that these are poor farmers who are living, who are actually sleeping on the roads and tents and makeshift platforms, or even their tractors. And when they came last December, it's just like brutal cold in Delhi, like it was one of the coldest winters in 70 years. And right now, it is March and it is the opposite. The temperature is like nearing 45. And it is like extreme heat.

Now, the government what they did is they cut off water supply, they cut off electricity, they cut off internet, so that the farmers will go back. So what the farmers were like, okay, they dug bore wells for water, they install solar panels for electricity. So like, little by little the self organization. because the number of people who are participating is so huge, so is their resourcefulness. And I think, for any protests of this magnitude for it to become self organized, in which the people can solve all the problems and the institutions of service or support is automatically emerging out of them. Because there are so... like the threshold has reached like, okay, we have enough people so that we can do everything on our own. We don't need an external support from the government. No matter what the government does, we can actually make this work on our own that has been achieved. And another aspect that is interesting is the lack of like a set of leaders. Of course, there are like eloquent leaders who actually speak of the protest.

But the decision making is decentralized. There are more than 500 farm unions who are actually participating in the protest along with other support groups. And even though like only 30 to 40 leaders are going and talking and negotiating with the government, every proposal that the government surpluses has to be brought back to the farmers, where they will collectively sit together and discuss and debate where every member will be present. And like every member of the union will be present there are more than 500 unions at the present time. They will debate, discuss, and the people who actually represent these farmers, they cannot decide on what they should, what distance to make, or what points to agree with the government, they have mainly a voice of the farmers to the government or spokesperson, they're not elected representatives, per se. And I think that that that difference from in a hierarchical society like India, to a representative form of a decision making process, to participate in decision making process, even though it's not perfect, of course, but the seeds of it is being assembled in this protest, even the anti-CAA protest, you can see that there is no single party that actually organize all these protests across the country. So I was in Mumbai, and in Mumbai there are multiple protests happening every day in different parts of the city. And the protests that I went to there wasn't a single organization, it was collectively decided and everyone was taking part in the decision. There are huge debates happening. And I think people need to experience democracy to actually understand what they are losing in the current social situation. Only when people realize that their voices are heard. And they get an experience of expressing their voices, no matter how eloquent how bad it is, it doesn't matter, then they understand that their voices deserve to be heard. I think people will not go back.

WG: Absolutely. Yeah, I think that's a beautiful sentiment.

BOG: I was wondering, this wasn't I keep stealing the headphone out of my co host ear. This wasn't one of the scripted questions. But how has COVID impacted India? As far as you know, like has has Modi and the BJP followed the pattern that so many authoritarian governments around the world have done with the pandemic and denied public access to services or denied maybe the dangers related to it? Or has there been much in the way of mutual aid response from communities to get people access to protective gear or medical access?

PJP: Okay so what the federal government did was they cleverly denied responsibility for the pandemic, in a way that they just tasked the state governments to handle the pandemic on their own. So that they will be free of the responsibility. That is what basically they did.

BOG: Oh, that's what Trump did...

PJP: And that's very clever, because most of the same governments are not run by the BJP. So what they can do is they can.... if a state government fails to provide access, they can just point to that government telling that "Okay, these people are not doing it well, like they are not letting the central government do the job." And they can get away with it. And in the states that actually are run by BJP, the numbers, the data that we see, the official data is never true. So there are states which do tracking and in good response. So personally my the state of Kerala, the state of Kerala has been lauded by international community for its past action and response because the state of Kerala has a strong public health care system. The government really funds the public health care and the state of Kerala was prepared to handle a pandemic because last year, there was a similar virus called nipah is hit the state and the state had to engage in protocols of how to handle a pandemic and like what other medical gear is that the blockers should wear that health professionals should wear and the government of Kerala was better prepared. The other state governments were not prepared for it.

And many of the states ruled by the BJP, they don't do the testing enough so that they can show that Okay, we have very low cases in our state because we are doing very well. This is not the case they're not testing to know whether like there are enough people who is actually contacting COVID and the government using their propaganda machine, the media, they are diverting every issue, like even when the COVID pandemic was at its peak, the media was discussing something completely different. Like they were going after like small things.... like celebrity news and stuff like that, they wer completely ignoring it. Now let me explain what was the actual humanitarian crisis that India faced during the pandemic. So when there was an initial lock down for 31 days that happened. So in India, there are like

really poor states, like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Orissa. So, the marginalized communities from these states, they don't get wages, literally they don't have any rights when they are living there. So what they do is they migrate to other states where they can find a job as manual laborers, or they set up small shops. Basically, most of them are manual laborers who work in construction sites. And the women, they might work as maids in the urban households and stuff like that. So there is a huge migration of people from the rural to the urban cities. And when the pandemic hit, immediately, the economy went to a standstill, there was no work. Everyone was asked to stay where they were right?

So these people, the people who are unorganized, was who are not actually the formal employees, they just their daily wage laborers, they just go everyday to any place they can find work, and they just work there. They collect their earnings and they get food from daily earnings. So when the entire lockdown happen, these people, they were completely cut off from their income. So what they did, they didn't have any other thing to do, they just started going back to their homes. And since it was a lockdown there was no railway, there was no bus service, there was basically no transportation available. So now you know how big India is right? People from across the country started walking back to their native villages! like walking 1000's of kilometers! So during the time of pandemic, you could see millions of Indians walking. And it was March which is like extreme summer. 1000's of people died due to sunstroke walking back home. There were images and videos of people lying dead in roads in railway stations and bus stops. People were run over by trains, when because they were sleeping in the railway lines. So it was terrible. And the government didn't do anything. And when asked about the number of deaths, in pandemic by these migrant laborers who are walking back home, the government told that we don't have any data about it. And the government is busy doing like other stuff like cricket or something like Bollywood is doing as well.

And it is busy passing laws that will further take away the rights of the... so it is during the pandemic that the Farm Bill first passed the labor laws which diluted the labor norms was passed.

So the government has their own priorities for corporatization, they don't care about what the actual people and citizens of India, the struggles they face or anything. But one thing that was noticeable was the Indian community, they reacted to this particular migrant labor crisis. So across the roads, when people are walking, people are offering water, food. So there was this mutual aid that was automatically. There was this huge, so in every city in which these migrant laborers are walking, people are offering them water, if you're offering them modes of transport, like they would take people who are really... who are elderly, who can't walk, or children, they will have them transport in small distances. Like a relay kind of transport mode was set up. Many restaurants, they opened up so that they can feed these people for free. And there are many families which were like stranded in remote places without access to... let's say I if I have a family and my elderly parents are living alone, and they need medicines, it's lockdown, the medical shops are not open. So there were volunteers who were ready to deliver essential medicines to this families. So there was a parallel, when the government failed the people, the citizens rose to the occasion to try at least try to mitigate a huge disaster. It wasn't perfect, of course, like it didn't work everywhere, but it it prevented a much worse disaster from happening.

WG: I love that people stepped up to help each other. Of course, nothing's perfect, but especially if you're reacting to a widespread disaster that could very well like, you know, affect you... or is affecting you as well. You know, it's a crisis. Crisis planning can often like look imperfect.

PJP: Yeah. And another thing that also came forward during this an issue that came to the forefront was police brutality. So this happened literally before the George Floyd issue happened. So what happened was during the lockdown, so you know, like many people who live in India are illiterate and they are and they are working the unorganized sector. They sell vegetables they sell.... So, in order for them to eat something today, they need to earn something today. It's not they have savings they can go back to get food. So many of these people who are like daily, like who food vendors like to sell vegetables and stuff like that, they came out to sell their stuff because they will die literally of hunger if they don't come out. And the government even though they promised to deliver food and stuff, in most of the places they didn't. So when these people actually came out to sell their produce, you could see

police going and like destroying their vehicles, beating them black and blue. These are people without any social or cultural capital. They can go to court, they don't have money to hire a lawyer to fight for their case. And you could see police trashing them black and blue. And then there were cases of custodial deaths that have happened, because they arrested like two people in Tamil Nadu. They've arrested a father and son for not closing the shop on time. So the law mandated that the shops should close by 7pm or something and they didn't close... they kept the shop open for five more minutes or something. And the police came, they arrested both of them. They took them to the police station, and they trashed them till they were dead. This happened last year. And this happened at a time when the George Floyd issue, the George Floyd murder, that protest was happening in US. And at that time there was a voice against police brutality. Right now, because of all these issues, there is a sentiment that... Okay, so till now, police was seen by the people because in India, people, like people worship authority. So they're always saw police as the saviors and things like that. And now, they are understanding that police are just instruments of the ruling power to just further their institutions of hierarchy. It is not actually for the citizens.... police are not there for the citizens to actually like fight for their rights. And that particular sentiment is also seeping in because now we could see the farmers being stopped by the police and they were firing tear gas and water cannons are these farmers who are like, really old farmers like they are 70 or 80 years old people who are actually coming in the winter, and they're firing water cannons at them. Which is like equivalent to like throwing knives at these people because it at six degrees, seven degrees, like water literally, it literally kills you if you get hit by it. And yeah, so the notion of police brutality as an issue has also been brought up due to this protest.

WG: Thank you for speaking on that. So we have just two more questions. You've touched on a lot of the topics that we were interested in hearing about and also like, way more and thank you so much for doing that. You've talked a lot about how like how the government operates the BJP, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But would you talk a little bit about this philosophy known as HINDUTVA? And can you give a sketch of like what this is? And it's also been said that the HINDUTVA movement is like the largest fascist street movement in the world. And I'm curious if this resonates with you.

PJP: Yeah, you can call it the largest, fascist street movement in the world, because it is happening in India. Because this is such a huge country with huge population. Anything that happens here will be like, the biggest thing.

BOG: That's a good point.

PJP: Yeah, because the the when the farmer protests happened on November 26, there was a call for an All India strike, which was participated by almost 250 million people, which automatically made it the largest in world history, because anything in India will become the largest in the world. So, I don't doubt that point at all.

So, why, what it is is actually? You have to understand what India what the word India is. India, the word comes from the word... so you have might have heard of the Indus Valley Civilization of is the Mohenjo-daro was a city. So there is this river called the Indus. And the land beyond Indus was called by Europeans as India. That's it. There is nothing more to the word India than that. So the name of the country came from the river, the land beyond the river. And the people who were living in that land. Which was beyond the river was called as Hindu. Hinduism is not a religion, per se, it is just what you call a group of people who lived in a particular locality. So in India, when you actually look at it, Hinduism is not a religion or monocultural religion anyway. It is like a mixture of multiple cultures, multiple faiths, there are different kinds of traditions, which are completely in opposition to each other. And India's political or geographically united place never existed in the greater scheme. It was like a lot of different smaller countries. And when the Mughals came, they try to unify it. Even before that there has been moments in Indian history when there has been large empires ruled over India. But even though there were these empires, the local cultures of the country... so in China, you might it is a little bit different, like Chinese culture is... even though there there are diversity and variations in it, it is mostly similar. India is more like Europe, the states of India are like the countries of Europe. The languages are completely different. So, if I go from Kerala to the next neighboring state,

I wouldn't understand anything that they say, because the language is completely different, the culture is completely different.

So, when the nationalistic struggle against the Britishers came, you needed like.... these people don't have a common culture, they don't have a common religion, they don't have a common, let's say, language. They don't even have a common sense of identity, so that they can rally against a common enemy. So the Britishers adopted this policy of dividing the Hindus, pitting the Hindus against Muslims and stuff like that. So to create unity, or create a sense of unity, or sense of identity, a nationalistic identity. The founder of RSS, who is Savarkar. He created this notion that, okay, let us create this new sense of identity and name Hindu, which is like the people who actually inhibit this locality, it has nothing to do with the religion, per se, it is just the people in the locality. And then he thought that okay, to make the Unity more foundational, because the big since there was a huge sectarian divide, because of religion, caste, language and everything. He used the spirituality of Hinduism the Hindu philosophy, to give it a much more stronger backbone, so that people will fit in together. And people only rally against it, against a common enemy if you identify an enemy, and instead of identifying the British as the enemy, he identify the Muslims as the enemy.

You might know that the person who assassinated Gandhi, Mohondas Karamcha Gandhi ('Mahatma' Gandhi), he was actually an RSS ideologues, he was a part of RSS, who believed that because Gandhi actually spread the idea of unity and harmony between the religions, and the RSS society of hindutva is completely against it. They want the the entire community who calls themselves as Hindus, even though it includes Jains, Buddhists, Parsis, and all the other, like even Sihks. They have to separate them from the Muslims because as far as they're concerned the Muslims are invaders who came and ruined our culture. So it's like, exactly like Hitler's notion of Aryan supremacy. And actually, there is much more similarity between the two because the Aryan race of Hitler and the dominant caste group of India, they actually hail from the same part, the Central Asia. That's why there's a similarity between the languages: Sanskrit and German.

They were like, okay, so they exactly copied the ideology that Hitler used in Germany, and they changed it to suit the Indian needs. That's what they did. And for that, they had to brutalize or demonize the community, the Muslim community. Then what they needed was they had to create this narrative of a history of a golden age of India, in which India was like the golden bird of the world and we had solutions for everything, we were technologically superior we were like an egalitarian society, heaven on earth. And then this Muslim invaders came, and they brought their religion, they ruined our culture, they broke our temples, they broke our gods, disrespect our gods. And we are suffering because of that. And it was the Muslims who brought the Britishers in, and like everything that is faulty with the country is because of the Muslims and you have to, you should never accept the Muslims as European, they can live here, but they have to accept their status as secondary citizens exactly what was subjected to the Jews. Even though there has not been concentration camps that has been set in there are retention camps.

The CAA law was actually something similar with and there is this entire procedure of NRC the National Register for Citizens, which is trying to create a new document and in which the citizens have to prove that they are Indian. So the entire anti-CAA protest was not just against the citizenship Amendment Act, it was against this implementation of this national interest for citizenship, the entire process. And since there was a huge backlash against it, it has still been kept on hold. Even though the government is telling that they will implement it, they will implement it. I think if the government starts to implement it, there will be huge, much bigger protests, which will happen along with the farmers protest right now. So the government is like... and since the government is facing elections, state government elections in the next month, they won't do anything to damage the reputation, right. So everything in India, everything this party that in this is basically that. So they want power, so that they can just sell India to the corporations, and they need this hindutva philosophy, to make sure that the people will always worship the established hierarchy and won't question anything. So this is how the dynamics of Indian nation as a whole right now works.

BOG: I guess a final question that we had would be you had touched on the conflict in Kashmir, and like obviously, it's a very complicated place on the border of two competing states. But we would love to hear about what had happened in Kashmir and a little more detail from your perspective and if you could sort of explain the situation and what to your knowledge the state of the people of Kashmir is at the moment in terms of military occupation.

PJP: So okay, before telling that I should mention that okay. Kashmir is not an issue that I am directly involved with. So, everything that I know is actually what I have heard from my friends who are actually from Kashmir. The articles that I read and from the activist who actually traveled. With respect to Kashmir, what is happening is that, so, there has a lot of history to Kashmir like it started with the independence and why Kashmir became part of India and not of Pakistan. So, Kashmir is not just one place. So it is Jammu and Kashmir. So there's like the entire state has three major parts one is Leh, one is Kashmir and one is Jammu. Of which Lehs is Buddhists dominated, Jammu is Hindu dominated, and Kashmir is Muslim dominated. So what happened is... so even though the people of Kashmir were mostly Muslim, the king of Kashmir at that time was a Hindu, and then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, he was a Kashmiri pundit. So Kashmir was his home state. So he actually really wanted Kashmir to be part of India. So now the history becomes a little bit like untrustworthy, even I don't exactly know what happened. So there were this... I think Pakistan instigated some militancy in the region, which forced the king of Kashmir to agree to a suit to India.

And there was something called an instrument of accession, which actually granted Kashmir special privileges. So the one thing which most people don't know is that these special privileges is not just unique to Kashmir in the Indian context, this is the same kind of privileges are provided to other states in India, like Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and there has been calls for independence and autonomy by these states too. And the Indian Government has been trying to like what do you say to suppress the revolts the government has been declaring martial law, there has been cases of the Indian Army brutalizing the people and killing them, overreaching of authority. The issue is that with the current government, Kashmir is like a issue of pride and national pride. Because citizens government is not able to deliver on any of the promises on economy, on employment, Social Welfare or any of these things.

The government needs some particular narratives or particular incidents or events that we can highlight as their strength. Because this government has come because of the charisma of this one Iron Man: Narendra Modi, who can destroy every obstacles in his path. And who can decide to take actions completely independently without worrying about this corrupt politicians and stuff. So big neutral narrative, they have to always show strength. And the easiest way to show spine is Kashmir, because they just toppled the state government with just one act and they just arrested everyone and they arrested the chief minister of that state and put them on house arrest for a year. They arrested all the prominent leaders in that state and put them on house arrest. Every single activists who tried to raise voice against Kashmir was arrested and new laws were passed just before the Kashmir state autonomy was snatched out. There was this loss called UAP. Which is like Prevention of atrocity and NSA – National Security Act. So what these acts enable the government is they can arrest anyone, just on suspicion, and they don't have to produce them on court for two years. So they passed these laws just before this Kashmir Act was passed, so that any opposition against this would be come met with complete incarceration. Then what they did was they completely cut off internet for a year, so that anything that is happening in Kashmir will never be like communicated to the mainland. So only the government and journalists and the government employees will be able to devise narratives and create stories. In the news when the Kashmir the article 35 was abolished the Indian propaganda news media, there were new celebrations in Kashmir, of people eating biryani and ham like playing with firecrackers and celebrating because their years of oppression are over.

And what is actually happening in Kashmir on the ground, the truth was actually revealed when certain activists travel to Kashmir and interacted with the people. So the military have complete autonomy, they can do anything they want, like the martial law is declared. It's called AFSPA – the

Armed Forces special power act, they can even kill people on suspicion. They have complete immunity against any atrocities that they commit. So, the problem with such an a process of water in the Indian sea from a personal perspective, I think that the people anywhere in the world should have the autonomy to decide what what kind of government they want. And it was fine till the Indian government had the Constitution because these are also citizens of India under the Indian law, and the constitution grant them the political rights they can they have the right to choose the government and what the central government did was toppling the democratically elected government who had legitimate power or the people gave them the legitimate power to rule them. So that was completely illegal and talk about illegality in India right now, everything whether something is legal or illegal is decided by the Supreme Court of India. And the RSS/ BJP government has destroyed the institutions in India in such a way that like the judiciary is also playing the same even as the government and in most of the cases where the judiciary knows that if they pass a judgment in fair play in favor of the government, the people who protest the judiciary conveniently decides to not take the case. They will just hold the case for years. So the then the Jammu Kashmir state was actually bifurcated into two different territories, that act was disputed in the Supreme Court.

There is a case in Supreme Court, when the government imposed internet a ban in Jammu and Kashmir, there was a case like the lawyers brought it up telling that it is a violation of human rights. That the people are not being given access to internet facilities. Because the entire businesses of Kashmir, they were completely cut off to the mainland, online, this everything just went down. What happened then was the government will tell that okay, we will need like two months to analyze the situation. And the court, we just grant them the two months. And again, the government after that, filed extension, and this court will just grant. So the court is just playing the same tune as the government. So in the farmers protests, something really interesting happened. The Supreme Court seeing that the farmers are coming to Delhi and the protest is not stopping, decided to intervene and tell that, "okay, we are ordering the government to stay the law for one and a half years." So the law cannot be implemented for one and a half years. The farmers are like, "okay, we don't care what the Supreme Court tells, we want the law to be abolished. We won't take anything else." So the it's like the people is literally losing faith in the institutions of judiciary, and the executive and legislature. The people are taking matters into our own hands. That is action. And I think that that's a huge change when people are realizing that they are the true sovereign, that the power actually resides in them to decide their own fate and their own lives. I think that is democracy.

WG: Absolutely. Yeah. Thank you for going into that... and I think that that people are really, you know, starting to feel their own power and starting to see the states, whatever state that they live in is as sort of the complete Sham that it is. And I think that you know, yeah, we can look to the farmers protest, you know, as the largest mass mobilization, like it is in India. So it's going to be the largest one, maybe. But as like one of the most robust mass movements in sort of recorded history in a way too. That was all the questions that we had. Thank you so, so, so much for your words and your energy, it was just a delight to get to talk with you a little bit and get to hear the things that you're working on and the things that you're thinking about. Would you give, if listeners are interested in reading some of your writing? Do you have a website? Is there a place that people can go to, to read your articles and to read your work?

PJP: I can actually provide you links of my articles, I usually publish my writings in like different journals. So I can give you a list of all the articles that I have. So you can share them with the listeners. I will also like to thank you for giving me this opportunity. And I hope that I did justice to these movements in communicating what is actually happening on the ground, because I know that I couldn't cover everything, maybe I might have left out the really important parts. And I might have, like, oversimplified many stuff, or might have gotten things completely wrong. But to what I know, I think, yeah, I really think that it is important for the international community to at least get a sense of what is happening in India right now. And like, and these are models that should be learned from and replicated elsewhere.

WG: Absolutely, yeah. Family, like, you did I think amazing justice to a very complex situation and topic and complex place. So, I hope that listeners will hear your words and go out and do their own research too, because so many people and I will link to some books and some articles too. If people are interested in learning about like anti-caste stuff a little bit more, if people are interested in learning about the languages, the bioregion, the the politics of the place, we will provide some links as well. And like as many voices as possible speaking about India, and the Indian diaspora and stuff that people face, you know, I think is best. So thank you so much. Do you have any recommendations? I remember you were talking about sort of anti-caste hip hop. Do you have any recommendations for like, songs that we could play on the show?

PJP: Yeah, I can give you links to that, like most of them are new too. Excellent. Yeah. I will mail you the links along with the audio clip. So that is actually a very new development that happened, like the hip hop was used by the anti-caste activists as a way of expressing themselves. That is completely, like mimicking what was happening in US. So I think so like, it's it's amazing that like, the people from who are oppressed, they are looking outside for signs to learn from for lessons to learn from. And I think till now, like we have been looking elsewhere to learn from it. I think it's about time that others look at us.

WG: Yes. Yes, yes. Absolutely. Thank you so much family.

BOG: This is great speaking with you. Let's do it again soon.

WG: Let's do it again. Yeah, same here. Okay. Yeah, take care. Stay healthy.

BOG: Ciao. Yeah,

PJP: I think it would be morning there, right. Yeah. Have a nice day.

WG: Have a nice evening.

PJP: Okay, bye bye.

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